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Arizona Veterinarian Appointed to President of United States Animal Health Association

(Phoenix) -- During the Annual Meeting of the United States Animal Health Association held October 21-27, 2004, in Greensboro, North Carolina, State Veterinarian Rick Willer will accept the gavel to serve as the Association's president for 2005. The only other Arizonan to serve as president of this Association was Dr. J. C. Norton, the second Arizona Territorial Veterinary Surgeon, who served as president in 1904.

Established in 1897 to deal with the adverse impact of Texas fever (bovine babesiosis) on the cattle industry, the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) serves as the nation's animal health forum. It is a science-based, dues-supported, voluntary national organization whose membership includes state, federal and international animal and public health agencies, allied animal agriculture industry and professional organizations, and individual members representing academia, animal owners and animal health professionals including practicing veterinarians.

USAHA serves as a forum for communication and coordination on animal related issues. Those issues have changed and expanded over the last century beyond animal health and disease control to include animal welfare, food safety, public health and, more recently, homeland security. By serving as a clearing house for new information and methods, it acts to develop solutions to animal health and food safety related issues based on science, new information and methods, public policy, risk/benefit analysis and the ability to develop consensus for changing law, regulations, policies and programs.

Willer, an Arizona native, was appointed Arizona's fourteenth State Veterinarian since Arizona was granted statehood 93 years ago. He succeeded Dr. E. Ray Hinshaw of Prescott. As President of USAHA, Dr. Willer will lead a membership of nearly 1,200, and a 100 member Board of Directors comprised of the chief animal health officials from all fifty states, the chief veterinary officers of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand, representatives from the American Veterinary Medical Association, Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians, the national Associations representing Bovine, Swine, Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians, and Avian Pathologists, and twenty national livestock industry associations.

Willer reports that the animal-related issues confronting this nation have expanded tremendously over the last few decades. Where previously the control and elimination of livestock disease was the primary focus of USAHA, that subject area has expanded to include animal disease impacts on public health and at the interface of wildlife and livestock, as well as the protection of the security of this nation from threats of agro- and bio-terrorism. He believes that because veterinarians are the only health professionals trained in multi-species, comparative medicine, the veterinary profession plays a critical role in addressing these complex issues. The veterinary profession is and will continue to be a major contributor to the successes of USAHA and the protection of this nation's animal agriculture resources.

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